

How to know  
**JAPANESE  
COLOUR  
PRINTS**



**ANNA FREEBORN  
PRIESTLEY**

Doubleday, Page & Company







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HARUNOBU—THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

# HOW TO KNOW JAPANESE COLOUR PRINTS

By  
ANNA FREEBORN PRIESTLEY



ILLUSTRATED

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TO ALL LOVERS  
OF THE  
JAPANESE COLOUR PRINT





## PREFACE

THIS book has been written for those who are eager to know something about the Japanese colour print, its origin, its technique, and the scenes portrayed; and to introduce the men who originated, developed, and perfected this realistic art of the common people of Japan, some knowledge of which is a requisite of modern culture. Those who love these beautiful brocade pictures, and do not care to search through large volumes on the subject, many of which are inaccessible to the general reader, may find here, among other things, the answer to the question so often asked, "What is a Japanese colour print?"

The knowledge I pass on to the reader has been collected from a thorough study of the works of the men best fitted to explain the Japanese colour print and the application of the art of the school called *Ukiyo* to wood engraving. I have added to this information by a close personal observation of the habits and customs of the Japanese people while

travelling among them, and by a careful study and handling of thousands of these prints, which illustrate so clearly the characteristics and idiosyncrasies of the artists of this popular school.

To understand these block prints, one must learn something about the scenes and subjects they portray. In the following pages, and in as small a compass as possible, I have tried to furnish a thorough foundation for an intelligent study of this most interesting art.

I offer my sincere thanks to all those writers on the colour print of Japan upon whose works I have relied for information concerning the development of the polychrome print, for the authenticity of the dates, and for the characteristics of the different artists. Those drawn upon most frequently were Ernest F. Fenollosa, Arthur D. Ficke, and W. von Seidlitz. Other writers from a study of whose works I have learned many things about this strange art are Laurence Binyon, Basil Stewart, and W. Anderson. I also thank those friends and helpers in Japan from whom I obtained so much interesting information about their quaint customs and many-sided life—information of great assistance in understanding and thus more thoroughly appreciating the pictures we are to study. I wish to thank sincerely Mr. Arthur D. Ficke and Mr. Ernest Ingersol, each of

whom read the manuscript and gave me many helpful suggestions.

The reader who wishes to pursue the subject further, and I hope there will be many such, will find on page 71 a short annotated list of helpful books.



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*Note:* The colour prints are reproductions of old prints, made with wood blocks cut from the originals, and imported from Japan. They were made by the House of Watanabe in Tokyo. Mr. S. Watanabe is acknowledged to be the best reproducer of the old colour prints in Japan, his work being particularly noted for its precision of register and fineness of colour. When the collectors of colour prints in Japan decided to hold an exhibition of the works of Hiroshige in 1918, Mr. Watanabe was chosen President of the Association for the Study of Ukiyoe, and intrusted with compiling the Memorial Catalogue, which is now considered one of the most authoritative of the books on Hiroshige's work.

The reproductions of the artists' signatures, the list of which is incorporated in the index, were made from tracings taken from prints in the author's collection, and are exactly the same size as the originals. It must be remembered that all of the signatures of an artist were not necessarily identical.



HOW TO KNOW  
JAPANESE COLOUR PRINTS



# HOW TO KNOW JAPANESE COLOUR PRINTS

## CHAPTER ONE

### WHAT A JAPANESE COLOUR PRINT IS

A JAPANESE colour print is a reproduction of a drawing made by means of engraved wood blocks. The picture is first drawn with brush and India ink upon a thin paper with areas later to appear coloured left white. This drawing is taken to the man who makes the wood blocks, whom we shall call the engraver. He pastes the sketch face downward upon a block about an inch thick, made from wild-cherry wood sawed lengthwise. He then cuts away all the superfluous wood between the lines of the drawing, so that the design is left standing in relief. This is known as the "key block." It is now the custom to speak of the first proof from this block as the "key block" also. The reader must note that the original drawing by the artist is completely destroyed. From this key block, the engraver takes as many proofs as the artist requires, and the artist colours one of these as he wishes the finished print

to appear. The engraver then makes a separate block for each colour in the design, carefully cutting guide marks (L ㄣ) at the bottom of each block, to make it possible for the printer to put each colour precisely in its proper position in the print. He sends these blocks with the coloured picture and the key block to the printer.

The printer prepares his paper by dampening it between layers of moist paper. He then mixes his water colours with a medium of rice paste, applies them to the appropriate block with a brush, and grades them to the proper shade or tint required. The slightly dampened print paper is then laid on the block, and the space to be coloured rubbed with the fingers or a bamboo pad until the desired shade is obtained. The print is then removed. This is the most difficult task in block printing, and few except the Japanese can do it without injuring the print. Much of the beauty of fine Japanese prints is due to the marvellous skill of the printers at this point in the process. Few of the artists of the Japanese colour prints cut their own blocks and did their own printing, but undoubtedly the greater among them watched their work carefully during the entire process. When all spaces requiring colour have been printed, the picture is finished.

The paper used for prints is made from mulberry



bark, and the beauty of the colouring in the old brocade pictures depends upon the quality of it. The old paper is soft, fibrous, absorbent, and tough, and has a surface similar to that of velvet, but its projecting fibres, or tentacles, are very minute. The colours rest, as it were, on the tips of the tiny tentacles, or fuzzy projections, which wave slightly and give slight glimpses of the ivory of the background through the colour. It is this vibrant quality of the surface of the paper that enabled the artist to give us those wonderful nuances of tone colour which no modern print possesses. It is this same vibrant quality, or waving movement of these tiny projections, that adds so greatly to the charm of antique prints, for it gives them the appearance of rich old brocade, with a mellowness of tone that is entirely lacking in the modern reproductions.

There was a very noticeable change in the paper of Japan about the year 1858. The art of making the old paper seems to have been lost, or neglected, in the excitement over the advance of commercialism, which was bringing into this isolated land so many new and interesting things. The reproduction of the old paper is one of the most difficult things to accomplish, and in fact is almost impossible, so observation of the paper is one of the most reliable tests of the age of a print. I have been told by a

Japanese print dealer that the men engaged in making modern reprints and reproductions are going into every corner of Japan in search of old paper, which might still remain on screens and elsewhere, to use in the making of modern prints. This shows how continually the collector of to-day must be sharply on his guard.

But the secret of making the paper was not the only part of the art that has been lost. None of the artists of the Japanese colour print after 1860 equals Hokusai or Hiroshige, the last great figures, or any of their great predecessors. Oh, the pity of it all! That a nation so intuitively talented should let pass from their finger tips that magnetic touch and magic skill that enabled them to reproduce the iridescence of the sun glistening on the breast of the humming bird, the ethereal snowlike petals of the plum blossom, or the shadowy flutter of the butterfly's wing.

One who admires and proposes to acquire specimens of the old block prints must learn to recognize the ordinary forms of reprints, reproductions, and forgeries. Reprints are made from the original blocks, which have been sharpened and reused long after the artist's time. It is true that some prints are so made that even experts are deceived, but these are

so rare we need not speak of them here. The cost of production of such prints is so high that they will never be numerous. Reproductions are prints made from blocks cut from an original print. I have found reprints and reproductions very useful and instructive if used in the right manner, but it is necessary that the amateur be able to detect them in order to protect himself from unscrupulous dealers. Forgeries are made by removing the signature of the artist from the block and inserting a new piece of wood with the name of another artist upon it.

As in all art, one can really learn to detect the false only by careful study of the genuine. In the handling of prints, one soon learns the peculiarities of each artist. The sweeping contours of a figure, the movement of a hand, the shape of a brow, the graceful curve of a slender neck, all these bespeak the name of the artist who created them, for these fair beings are not like any living Japanese women, but are the ideal creatures of the artist's own imagination. It is impossible to forge successfully for a long time, or even completely and perfectly to reproduce work that is so individual.

A more mechanical way to detect the genuineness of an old print is to hold it up to the light, and if the design shows as clearly from the back as it does from the front, the print is probably an old one.

This test is given by the best authorities, but I have found that I cannot always depend upon it, alone.

The mellowness of colour, that time alone can produce, and only in the old vegetable pigments, is always lacking in prints that are not genuine antiques.

Do not judge a print wholly by its condition. These productions, with the exception of a few pillar prints and kakemono, were kept in portfolios away from dust and smoke, and I have seen many of them in Japan that were as brilliant and clean as any new specimen. Worm holes, damaged conditions, and faded colours may easily be imitated, and these are the first deceptions used in selling goods that are not genuine.

Another deception is made by craping the paper to counteract the crude colours used in prints after 1860. It gives a very pleasing effect, and undoubtedly was a very skilful process, requiring difficult technique. This is another aid one may use in detecting the age of a print.

The date of a print and the identity of the artist may be determined wholly or in part by the seals which appear upon it. Mastery of this subject requires considerable study, and it is usually sufficient to know that there are a date seal, a publisher's seal, a censor's seal, and usually an artist's seal, and to take care not to trim these off. These seals do not

necessarily all appear on one print, but they often do, and are a great aid to collectors.

Those interested in the dates of prints should study the chronology of Japan. Here I have place only to say that the Japanese use a cycle of time consisting of sixty years, which is divided into lesser cycles of twelve years. Each of these twelve-year cycles receives the name of an animal, and they follow one another in regular sequence, somewhat like our signs of the zodiac. Besides these cycles, they have periods that begin and end with some great event.

Nearly everyone interested in Japanese colour prints is attracted and puzzled by the Japanese characters on so many of them. In their eager curiosity, some collectors ask the first Japanese they meet to translate these for them, forgetting that all Japanese in this country are not highly educated and that most of the old prints were made at a time when the Japanese language was different from what is now. One could not expect any French maid quickly and fluently to translate a Provençal lyric. The characters on the colour prints are usually titles, descriptions, or simple poems.

Those who buy the colour print for its beauty should know something about the care of these fast-



disappearing treasures of art, and it is for them I give this information, rather than for the well informed. The margins should never be trimmed or removed; if torn, a mat may be placed over the print. There are often seals on the margins that enable the collector to determine the age of a print. Holes may be mended by selecting pieces that match in colour from an old and worthless print and pasting them lightly on the back. I have removed creases and cleaned prints by dipping them in water and then placing them on a stiff cardboard to dry, but it is not safe to do this unless one is certain that the blue is the old vegetable colour, as the blue in some of the later prints will run. Surimono should never be wetted as they contain colours derived from metals. In mounting prints, only the top corners should be pasted to the cardboard. Do not paste the edges down as it prevents anyone from examining the back of the print, a very necessary thing to do when testing for genuineness. Owing to the size of triptychs they are better kept separate, or mounted in such a manner that they may be placed side by side to show the whole composition at a glance. Never place prints in a strong light, as it tends to make them lose their brilliancy of colour. Surimono are especially susceptible to light, owing to the fact that their colours are derived from gold, silver, and bronze.



A word about collecting. I found it very difficult in Japan to secure genuine old prints. The collectors from Europe and America have searched its remotest corners for these treasures, and the Japanese are certainly following the good advice given them by that lover of all things Japanese, Ernest Fenollosa, for they are buying back many of the treasures which a few years ago they considered cheap and plebeian and let go for a mere song. Their former attitude, which many of them still have, may be ironically contrasted with that of some in this country at the present time. I speak of those, fortunately few in number, who collect and "admire" certain Japanese colour prints because they think it is a smart thing to do. Of course, the genuine collector is the one who collects those prints which give him pleasure and which he can (or cannot) afford, and who reads the criticisms of the authorities only to sharpen his own critical faculty and multiply the sources of his pleasure.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE LIFE IN THE PRINTS

NO GREAT art, enduring for centuries, has ever grown in a dish of intellectual stones and water, cut off from the rich earth of human passions, conventions, and revolts, and never touched by the eery mists and rains of human fears and imaginings. It is not yet a hundred years since Japan was opened to the world, and the people of Europe and America still find it difficult to understand a land whose history and civilization has been so unlike their own. The Japanese colour print flourished during the two centuries which preceded the end of the epoch of isolation, that is, from about the middle of the Seventeenth Century to about the middle of the Nineteenth. Only after years of study and many long visits to Japan can one begin to re-create in his imagination the strange and beautiful civilization which nourished that art, but a brief historical sketch of the period, a few words on each of the chief subjects of the print, and a glance at the principles of Eastern art may give the reader greater

pleasure in looking at prints and a desire to study further.

The Japanese colour print rose and declined during the rule of the Tokugawa family, the most powerful dynasty of the shogunate. The shoguns were generals sent by the Mikado to drive the Ainus, who were the predecessors of the Japanese in these islands, farther east, in order that he might increase his dominion. These military leaders usurped the government in the latter part of the Twelfth Century and established their capital at Kamakura. The Mikado continued to reign in his capital at Kyoto, but these shoguns were the real rulers of the country for seven centuries. Although Japanese history tells us that the reign of the Imperial family has remained unbroken for centuries the successive shoguns had full control of all public money, and doled out to the Emperor whatever they saw fit, so that, in fact, they completely usurped the authority and functions of the hereditary emperors as long as the shogunate lasted, that is, until 1867.

Arthur D. Ficke, in his *Chats on Japanese Prints*, tells us that, during the whole period of print production, Japan was a land of gorgeous splendour, regulated by rules of conduct and manners so inflexible that they amounted almost to caste regulations. One may visit Nikko to-day and still see

evidence of this splendour of the shoguns in the magnificence of the mortuary chapels of Iyeyasu and Iyemitsu; or one may read a detailed and eloquent description in La Farge's *An Artist's Letters from Japan*.

Iyeyasu founded the Tokugawa dynasty in 1603. He was a shrewd and sagacious ruler. At the beginning of his authority, he rearranged the great feudal estates into which the preceding shoguns had divided the then existing territory of Japan, and placed over these fiefs, or feudal estates, military officers of his own choice. These leaders, or feudal lords, were called daimyos. Iyeyasu compelled the daimyos to leave their wives and families in the city of Yedo (Tokyo), which had been chosen for his capital, and required the lords themselves to remain half the year in that city. This was done in order that these daimyos might be restrained from becoming too powerful in their great feudal estates, and it explains why, in these prints, we see portrayed so many processions of daimyos and their armed retainers going to or from the capital.

The passing of a daimyo procession in those days must have been a delight to the people of Japan. The lordly daimyo, arrayed in gorgeous robes, was carried on the shoulders of his servants in his stately norimono (palanquin), and this was followed by a

retinue of armed retainers, the samurai, bearing their two swords with all the pride and glory which they show in so many of these prints. How the men and boys along the highways must have envied these warriors this pomp and display of chivalry! To this day in Japan it is considered an honour to say one sprang from a samurai family. When a daimyo made this journey to or from Yedo, apparently he took his whole household with him, and it must have been a gala day for the country people when one of these processions passed their way. It is not strange that these great retinues marching along the highways should furnish artists of that day with many a subject and event for their brushes.

Of course, such a colourful civilization provided the artists of the colour print with a multitude of subjects, but one may say that in general these fall into four groups: (1) Portraits of actors and theatrical scenes; (2) Portraits of courtesans and geisha girls; (3) Landscapes; (4) Illustrations of historical and legendary events and of stories of mythical heroes.

Of prints of actors the question most often asked is: Why have these artists given such grotesque attitudes and distorted features to this class? I have been told by a Japanese student that the reason is that, in his country, the interpretation of a play de-

pendes much more on attitude and movement than it does in our country, and that expression by means of elocution is secondary. In Japan, different degrees of sentiment and passion are expressed by the features and gesture, rather than by the tongue. I was very much puzzled by these exaggerated posings and grimaces shown in some of the actor prints until I attended plays in the Orient. One soon learns to understand the silent language of their symbolism and to catch unconsciously the significance of a gesture or movement. Before attempting to understand these theatrical prints, one should read the historical play known as *Chushingura*, or *Loyal League of the Forty-Seven Ronins*, as it is frequently called. A description of this play may be found on page 223 of Basil Stewart's book. Almost all the artists of this school have pictured scenes from this thrilling romance that displays so vividly that spirit of old Japan known as bushido.

Before discussing the second subject used so frequently by the artists of the print, the courtesan and geisha, it will be necessary to give the reader some idea of what that part of Tokyo known as the "Yoshiwara" really is. The Yoshiwara is the name given to the courtesan section in Tokyo; in other cities it has other names. Without knowing something of this section, called "The Flower Quarter,"



it is impossible to understand many of these prints.

The Yoshiwara, the home of the courtesans (not the home of the geisha), is a section in the northeast part of Tokyo, set apart by the authorities, where these unfortunate women are compelled to live. These women were sometimes sold to the Yoshiwara when they were little girls. I have read that, when a great famine comes, the man who buys these little girls is always ready to offer money to the starving parents for these children, but I am glad to say that this practice is not allowed at present, at least, not openly. There are still many of these sad women who have been sold to this life in order that they may provide for aged parents or some helpless one dependent upon them; nevertheless, many go there of their own free will. Upon entering, they must give up their own patois, learn a quaint old language of Japan, and in the old times they had to educate themselves in all that speaks for refinement. The courtesans of those days must have been of a different type from the women we place in that class to-day, since all the great artists of that Golden Age of the colour print lavished their highest skill upon the portrayal of chosen representatives. The dress of an inmate of the Yoshiwara of that day was of such gorgeousness and splendour, and so entirely different from that worn by other women, that she made a

fitting model for these artists. The law compelled her to wear her obi, or sash, tied in front. The Green Houses, so often referred to, were the tea houses that lined the main thoroughfare of the Yoshiwara. The fronts of these houses were barred on the street level, as you will often see in the prints. The inhabitants, visible behind the bars, were called Oiran.

The geisha girls were and are entirely different. They did not live in the Yoshiwara. I have often seen the geisha school in Kyoto where these entertainers are trained. At the age of seven they can enter the school, where they are trained to dance and sing and play the musical instruments, the samisen and koto. After a thorough course of this training, they become finished geisha girls. They are supposed to know all the latest jokes, and to be apt at repartee, accomplished conversers, and refined in appearance and bearing. In fact, the geisha must be an entertainer in every sense of the word. She wore, as she does to-day, just as beautiful robes as the Oiran, but less showy, and tied her obi in the back, as did all other women. She was not necessarily immoral, as many seem to think.

In the third subject used by these artists, landscape, two great names overshadow all the rest, Hiroshige and Hokusai. The characteristics of their work, and of colour-print landscape in general, will





HOKUSAI—SAYONARA (GOOD-BYE)



be considered later. The relationship between the quality of the natural beauty of Japan, the quality and turn of her artists' imaginations, and the conventions of her art is a subject one might discuss endlessly and profitably.

History and legend have been among the richest fields from which the colour-print artists have drawn. After one has read the history of this Island Land with its endless wars, its strange legends and myths, has studied the characteristics of the daimyos and samurais, with their unique codes of honour, and has noted the form and growth of every kind of activity in this capital of the East, much can be understood in these drawings that otherwise would be but meaningless parts of pleasing pictures.

I shall name only a few of the deities that appear in the prints hoping it may arouse the reader to look further into the mythology of Japan, without some knowledge of which it is impossible fully to comprehend the meaning of many of the scenes and figures found in the block prints. Among the Japanese deities are the Seven Gods of Fortune, who always appear in a humorous manner. The seven are: Fukuro, the god of wisdom, with his abnormal forehead; Juro, patron of learning; Diakoku, the god of riches, with his mallet and rice bags; Yebisu, with his fish, a provider of daily food; Bishamon,

god of war; Benten, goddess of fertility; and Hotei, with his pack. These Seven Gods of Fortune are supposed to visit every port on New Year's Eve, bearing the takaromono (gifts and treasures). One should be familiar also with a few other mythical characters, such as Kwannon, goddess of mercy, whose image has been produced in porcelain, in bronze, in crystal, in amber, in jade, and in almost all the precious stones, and is sold at our auctions often for fabulous prices. There are also Shoki, the demon-queller, and Kintaro, the boy Hercules of Japanese mythology.

We should also learn about the Five Festivals of Japan. Many prints contain scenes from these joy days of the flowery empire. In the games of the people, we find the explanation of much of this art, for the social life has furnished the artists with themes for some of their most fascinating pictures.

The Japanese artist in the medium of the colour print had, then, rich and varied sources of subject matter and inspiration. How did he use them? What was the peculiar quality and nature of his imagination? What were the conventions of his art? These questions are best answered by the prints themselves, and each person interested in the prints will come nearer the truth if he formulates for himself what they tell him. However, I offer a few generally ac-

cepted facts, closely related to and overlapping each other, that may help the print-lover in his search for the true interpretations. The Japanese artist appeals to the imagination and intellect in a language of symbols, following certain traditions, in fact, the Japanese seem to think it insinuates a lack of intelligent understanding on the part of the observer to depict the thing or object itself, because they have become so accustomed to expressing their thoughts by means of this symbolical language, and this to me is the great charm of the colour print. Furthermore, he appeals directly to subtle forms of emotion and delight, and with this end in view, and using all for his central harmony of effect, he does not hesitate to distort and stylize appearances. Compare all of this with the direct statement and realistic subject-matter appeal which abound in Western art. If a Japanese artist wished to portray purity and rouse our emotions with his portrayal, he might draw a carefully composed bough of cherry blossoms; a French artist wishing to do the same thing might paint an insipid and slightly suggestive figure of a virgin, aged sixteen.

I have read volumes and spent hours in trying to sift out these grains of truth. I have found here a little and there a little, but I have learned more in talking with and watching the Japanese people in

their native land, where one soon learns many of the symbols of their art.

I have endeavoured to give in these pages a few things that the lover of the block print may find interesting in the study of these old pictures, which portray the everyday life of this sequestered people. In wandering through quaint old villages in Japan, the thought that was ever uppermost in my mind was that centuries ago life flowed on for this people very much as it does at the present time. The scenes pictured in prints that were sketched a hundred years ago are almost the same to-day. I doubt if the young Kyoto, when Nara was the capital, and the Kyoto that was the seat of government for eleven centuries, were much different from the Kyoto of to-day. A few modern things have crept in, but the old traditions are still there, and this city that was ancient before America opened her eyes to civilization is still there, at the base of that gray cloud of mountains. It is when we are in this old city of massive temples, small gray-brown houses, and primitive customs and habits that we see something of the real Japan. In time, we absorb that from her atmosphere which makes us feel the beauty of her native hills, appreciate her wonderful works of art, and learn to love the flowerlike people of this flower land. One begins to understand Japan and her peo-

ple when one gets a glimpse of her family life, where the spirits of the departed hover ever near to inspire, to protect, and to act as an incentive for each member of the household to live up to his highest ideal. In this home circle the children are the flowers of life, the symbols of undefiled humanity, and it can be truly said of the Japanese that cleanliness is next to godliness, for they bathe as many as five times a day. If you wish to know Japan aright, visit her villages in the mountains, live in the clear, clean atmosphere of her simple life, and not only the colour print, but all the works of art produced by the skilful fingers of the people of this Oriental land will be dear to you.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE NEW ART AND ITS PROGRESS

THE art of making colour prints arose in Japan, as Fenollosa reminds us, in response to a demand on the part of the people for some kind of art with which they might satisfy their æsthetic longings.

At the close of the Sixteenth Century, the shoguns, aroused by a fear of Catholicism, closed Japan to all the peoples of the world except the Chinese and the Dutch, and it remained closed for the succeeding two hundred years. Their dealings with the Dutch and the Chinese at Nagasaki were their only link with the outside world. A clever and energetic people, they naturally sought for something of that element in the lives of other peoples which they saw their own life did not have. They learned from the Dutch the advancement that the world was making in all lines of industrial art, and, never an ignorant and down-trodden people, they longed to have some part in the new culture. They distrusted Buddhism, Christianity was denied them, and they were shut



out from all the aristocratic schools of art in their own country. Where was this people to look for something to satisfy its craving for æsthetic advancement?

What they sought came with the Ming refugees, who poured into Japan, bringing with them their beautiful treasures of porcelain, lacquer, and painting. Confucianism and culture had at last come from the land which already had been the source of all things to this prison empire.

These fleeing refugees, escaping the wrath of the new Manchu rulers, had brought with them strange and lovely screens, upon which were painted beautiful pictures of women and children in natural attitudes. The people were enraptured with this new art that portrayed real living beings instead of the mystical and conventional designs to which they were accustomed. This lifelike art awoke the soul of the people, and like the moth of her own silk culture, Japan burst the fetters that had been binding her so straitly and came forth into the sunshine of a new life. A desire for things Chinese spread to her remotest parts, until a craving for a more lifelike art was felt in her two great schools of painting, the Tosa and the Kano.

This renaissance of art, which is referred to as the Primitive Period, or first epoch into which the his-

tory of Japanese prints may be divided, begins about 1660. It was first felt in the aristocratic Kano school, which had always followed Chinese painting to a certain degree, but it soon spread. An artist in this school was the first to break away from the old style. Gradually, his figures began to assume more lifelike forms. The courtier and the warlike scenes began to give place to the portrayal of daily life. This innovator was Iwasa Matabei (1577-1650), who, although he worked solely as a painter, is considered the founder of the new naturalistic school of art, termed Ukioye, for it is in his art that the first changes can be seen. His followers took up the new realistic style, but all, like their leader, worked only as painters. It was Matabei who planted the seed that grew and blossomed later into the beauty of the full polychrome print, and to him is given the credit for being the real originator of this new art of the common people of Japan. He is especially noted as the artist who painted the famous Hikoné screen, which was the treasure of the daimyo of Hikoné Castle on Lake Biwa, and which was sent to the exposition at Paris in 1890. It is a six-fold screen, and represents figures of men, women, and children, in lifelike attitudes. Fenollosa has reproduced one panel of this screen in his *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*.



YEISHO—THE WOMAN IN THE BATHROBE



I shall make no effort here to describe any of the artists of this time except those who are of the first rank, and acknowledged as such by all authorities.

The new school of art was truly founded by the man who gave it a medium that developed into one of the great and unique art forms of the world. Ischikawa Moronobu, who worked between the years 1675 and 1695, was the first to apply the new art motive to the process of wood engraving, thereby making it possible to produce these drawings in such quantities, and at such low prices, that they became very popular. All his pictures were printed in black and white only. If any of his work is found in colour, it was tinted with the brush after having been printed. He awakened this new art by his influence, and held together the followers of Matabei until the invention of the real polychrome print in 1765. As a painter, he worked in the Kano school and followed the popular style. His pictures are noted for the delicacy of his style, which seems to sparkle with life and vivacity. His prints are very decorative in their arrangement of black and white spaces. He made numberless prints and illustrated many books. Book illustration, indeed, was the first use to which the wood block print was put in Japan. It is said that Moronobu became a monk in his old age.

Another technical advance was made by Okumura Masanobu (1684-1769), who invented the lacquer print, in which lacquer is used to heighten some of the colours. He portrayed graceful female figures and scenes of social life, producing a most wonderful effect by the use of only two colours besides the black of the outline, and some writers credit him with the invention of the two-colour print. Arthur Ficke says of this artist, "Not only does he tower among the greatest men of the time, but around him revolve the changes in technique, full of far-reaching consequences." He lived a long life of varied achievements.

奥村政信

*Okumura  
Masanobu*

A contemporary of Masanobu was Torii Kiyonobu (1664-1729), the founder of the Torii School, which produced many colour-print artists. He was the first of them to use the actor as a subject. He elevated this subject to a permanent place in Ukiyo-e, and made the production of this kind of print profitable. He introduced colour into the printed design with the brush, and his prints may be distinguished by their vermilion. He used also an orange red (tan, a lead pigment), a carmine red (beni, a vegetable juice), and a yellow and green, with pleasing effect. The reader must bear in mind

清信

*Kiyonobu*



that these hand-coloured prints (*urushi-ye*) were all coloured by the brush after being printed in black and white outline. These old hand-coloured prints have become scarce and are very much sought. Kiyonobu may be truly called the founder of the popular print. Moronobu had reigned supreme as the portrayer of courtly subjects, which were greatly admired by the samurai, but the pictures of actors in character costumes appealed to the heart of the masses, and were to the common people of Japan just what they had been longing for. They swept over village and country place alike.

In the judgment of Ernest Fenollosa the finest draughtsman among these early makers of colour prints was Kiyomasu (1679-1762). *Kiyomasu* 清倍 He possessed a keen sense of life. Ficke says, "Nothing can surpass the vigour of line work in some of his large figure prints, great curves made with a heavily charged brush, expressing with notable simplicity the beauty of flowing drapery." His works are filled with life and vigour. His period of activity lies between the years 1725 and 1759.

Masanobu, Kiyonobu, and Kiyomasu worked as block-print artists, side by side, through the many phases of this art down until the transition period, developing to the point of perfection the hand-

coloured print. They made the size of the designs smaller, used gold mixed in lacquer for heightening the colour, and introduced the triptych form of composition.

The main object of this survey of the men of the Primitive Period has been to keep the mind of the reader on the artists of first rank. There were many followers of these masters, but I do not care to describe them here, because it might confuse the student and cause him to become lost in a labyrinth of minor talent. There is one great name that rightly belongs in this epoch, and that is the name of Kwaigetsudo, but I have not placed him among these Primitives because there is so much uncertainty about him. The writers differ as to who he really was, but all pronounce the work acknowledged to be his, or that of several artists using his name, with its marvellous brushwork, to be among the best work produced by Ukiyo.

This brings us to the Transition Period, which began in 1743 and ended with the invention of the true polychrome prints in 1765. During this time, all the artists vied with each other in trying to introduce more colours into their designs by means of more blocks, so that it may be truly called a period of technical development. In 1743, printing with two blocks was discovered. Shigenaga is given the



credit for this invention by most authorities, although some writers assert positively that Masanobu was the first to use two blocks. This advance was adopted by all the colour-print artists of the day, and became the distinguishing mark of the decades between the Primitive Period and the ushering in of the period of highest achievement. A third block began to be used about the middle of the Eighteenth Century, and soon after, additional colours were added, so that, by 1765, xylography was unrestricted in respect to colour effects.

The reader should have no difficulty in remembering one artist, who stood, as it were, on the great divide of Ukiyo. Shigenaga, born in 1697, drew strength and encouragement from the Primitives, who were passing from the company, and aided those struggling at his side to remove technical limitations, but, sad to relate, like Moses of old, he was permitted only to gaze into the Land of Canaan filled with many flowers of the true polychrome print, for he died in 1756. However, he left in Harunobu one whom he had trained and who was worthy to carry on to completion the work he had begun.

重  
長

*Shigenaga*

The artist who stood highest during this time of Transition was Torii Kiyomitsu, whose best work

lies between the years 1760 and 1765. He developed the three-colour print and discovered a beautiful blue which is a characteristic of his work. His ingenious manipulation of colour and the manner in

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which he superimposed one shade over another gave to his prints a charming effect. The designs of this artist have always been a delight to me. I can describe his method in

*Kiyomitsu* no way better than to quote the writer who says of this artist: "The outstanding feature of Kiyomitsu's work is its formalism. Whatever he touches is compressed to a pattern, and rendered into bold hieroglyphics of sweeping curves. His line is simple, powerfully dominated by a circular movement that is singularly and inexplicably delightful. His colours, even though they remain only two or three in number, never lack variety and decorative effect."

At this time the great artist Harunobu, whom I shall discuss later, was experimenting with the polychrome print.

We have seen that the common people of Japan, isolated, and starving for art, welcomed, about 1660, a new simple and realistic art brought in by Chinese refugees. Matabei, a painter, took up the new style, called *Ukioye*, Moronobu applied it to wood engraving, Masanobu advanced it technically,

Kiyonobu made it popular, and Kiyomasa distinguished it with his drawing. The last four named coloured their prints by hand, and may be grouped together as the four great Primitives. To these must be added the fine work sometimes attributed to Kwaigetsudo. After these men came a period of transition, 1743-1765, marked by technical experimentation and progress. The great figure of this period was the master of colour, Kiyomitsu.

Prints could now be obtained by the public of Japan for a few cents, and I can see in fancy what a change this new art must have brought into the life of the common people, for all in this Land of Yamato have always been ardent lovers of the beautiful. I have seen babies gripping their wooden clogs with tiny toes, stumbling over rocks, and clambering up steep hillsides, to gather coveted flowers and hold them tenderly to hearts throbbing with the joy of possession. To see such love of nature and catch the look of affection in the black, untroubled eyes of these children is worth the long journey one must take to see this land of art. Imagine what it must have meant to this people to have such a world of beauty come into their meagre lives. For a few cents they could now read the history and mythology of their country in beautifully coloured pictures, look upon scenes in far-away

places, and, joy of joys, see freely, though in pictures, the plays of the theatre! I am told that even to-day a Japanese girl considers herself fortunate if she has the privilege of attending the theatre once in her lifetime. We who saw the first movies can have some idea of the delightful newness of the pleasure that the first colour prints must have given these people when the men of Ukiyoe spread abroad the splendid pageant of feudalism, pictured the fascinating scenes of romance and history as acted by famous players, and showed the people the natural beauty of their sea-girt islands.



UTAMARO—THE GOLDFISH



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE GREAT PERIOD

WE NOW come to the greatest period in the development of this purely Japanese art. Now that all technical restrictions had been overcome, each artist could fully assert without limitations his peculiarities, susceptibilities, and versatility, could express his view of life and sense of colour without restraint or lack of mechanical assistance. The artistic impulse of the Primitives was almost wholly expended in decoration. These first designers of the culminating period were a little nearer life in their pictures. They moulded the forms of life according to their own heart's desire, which Von Seidlitz calls "naïvely imaginative."

The man who stands at the opening of this epoch of highest achievement is Suzuki Harunobu. He increased the number of colour blocks to seven, and sometimes to as many as twelve, thus removing all restrictions so far as the technical process of printing pictures from wood blocks was concerned. By so doing he brought the true polychrome print into

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*Harunobu*



being in 1765. The characteristics of his work are harmony of colour and purity of tone. A wonderful brilliancy of colour in his prints contrasts greatly with the subdued tints of many of his successors. We can trace the Chinese influence in his art, and catch glimpses of the strength of the Primitives; also, he is said to have been the first artist to use a background in his prints. He refused to draw actors and turned his artistic skill to the representation of aristocratic ladies, fair women in natural attitudes and graceful occupations. For six years Haronobu produced prints whose grace is unsurpassable. His young girls of Japan are exquisite in their naïve sweetness and calm Oriental charm. "They are not Japanese women," says Arthur Ficke of the idyllic creatures of this artist's fancy, "but living fairy tales, butterfly beings out of nowhere. All that is joyous and playful in the Japanese spirit lifts them on wings of fantasy into regions of universal delight. They are the most fragrant flowers of Japanese art." This artist's prints are almost square, and smaller than the ordinary oban.

The actor print was revived by Katsukawa Shunsho (1726-1792), whose work is in the 'seventies. He reintroduced this field of subject matter in 1764, and in technique at first followed Harunobu, but it was not long until his individuality asserted



itself. His work showed more movement, life, and vigour and his colouring more strength. He arose to be one of the foremost artists of Ukioye, reaching his highest excellence about 1775, and in his own line became as popular as Harunobu was in his. They worked side by side, each in his own field; Shunsho perfecting the actor-print with its vigour of line and brilliancy of colour combination, Harunobu producing his graceful figures—a combination striking in its contrasts.

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章

*Shunsho*

Shunsho distributes his black masses in such a way as to produce a charming effect. The very simple arrangement of his draperies secured a pleasing balance of his colours, and his faculty for effecting this aided him greatly in representing actors in women's parts. He secured a very delicate effect by the use of special light rose in his violet, and his work is notable for its lovely tans and yellowish browns. Shunsho collaborated with Shigemasa in the production of the "Beauties of the Green Houses," which Von Seidlitz says is one of the most beautiful works of art made by the artists of this school. His prints are mostly in hoso-ye form, and are not scarce, owing to his large output. A long list of his works is given by Von Seidlitz. He retired from the colour-print field in the 'eighties and

resumed painting. Shunsho had many pupils, the most famous of whom was the great Hokusai, at that time known as Shunro. The artists of his school, save Hokusai, will be considered in the next chapter.

Contemporary with Shunsho was Koriusai, whose life, like that of most of these men of Ukiyo-e,

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龍  
齋

*Koriusai*

is shrouded in the mist of uncertainty. By some he is declared to be Harunobu's greatest pupil, and by others to have been an artist who worked independently. He was a samurai, or feudal vassal of knightly rank, but upon the death of his master he became a ronin, that is, a retainer without a lord, or a "wave man," as such are commonly called. When Koriusai became a ronin, he took up painting to support himself, entering this field of art about 1760, so that he was contemporary with Shunsho. He chose women as his subjects, and showed originality in his choice of colours, so that one soon learns to recognize his dark orange and blue, and the pleasing results obtained by the manner in which he arranges them. Some of his smaller prints have a beauty equal to Harunobu's, yet lack something of the subtle colour of his master's. His chief characteristic is the amount of composition he can encompass in his narrow hashira, or pillar prints and kakemono-ye; the decorative art he could crowd

into these narrow strips was marvellous. His animal and bird prints are exquisite, and the manner in which he uses *gauffrage* (blind printing) is a delight to the eye. His "Fighting Cocks," with their beautiful white feathers standing out in relief like new fallen snow beside the luscious red of their crests, is a combination in colour that only the mind and magic touch of an Oriental could devise. "The Hoho Bird Above the Clouds," and a print of red and white parrots, are beautiful beyond words; also lovely are "The Crane in the Snow," and "Ducks in the Reeds." A white cat has made a fitting subject for the display of this blind printing, a process in which the skill of the brush is combined with the pressure of the printer's elbow. Twelve of these animal pictures form a series all of which are done partly in blind printing, and to be the possessor of this set, drawn by such a master of *gauffrage*, would be to have an endless source of enjoyment.

First place in the art of Ukiye has been given to Kiyonaga, crowned monarch of them all by critical writers on this subject. He began his career in 1775, but did not reach his highest excellence until the 'eighties, when he threw off all conventionalities, followed his own ideals of the artistic, and, as Fenollosa says, "Became, as it were, the master of them all."

清長

Kiyonaga

Naturally, the pupils of other teachers wished to come under his influence, and we can readily trace something of his style in almost all the artists of his time. He seems to have made an effort to cast from his prints everything but the natural, and thus created a reverence for the real that was felt throughout the whole field of art. He chose for his subjects healthy, normal women, and pictured them in their ordinary outdoor amusements and at their varied occupations.

I shall not endeavour to give the many reasons why most authorities have placed the work of this artist so high, but will quote a paragraph from Arthur D. Ficke that may help to throw some light on this artist's real skill: "Kiyonaga saw nature with clear eyes, and on the solid foundation of observed fact he reared the noble structure of the vision of his life—a vision in which the world is peopled by a race such as the human race ought to be. . . . He was no colour dreamer, but a great harmonist of lines and spaces; and the lofty skies and wide horizons that create distance behind his figures attest to this wisdom." As for myself, I have never been able, in studying his prints, to see the greatness of this artist. I fail to see the beauty ascribed to these "tall, strong creatures that move with the stately grace of superb animals," as one writer

has put it. Who can think of the flowerlike women of Japan in such terms? Give me rather the dream maidens of Harunobu, fashioned after the desires of his own heart, for every Japanese describes the women of his land in the language of the flowers. Some of Toyokuni's early work, which I shall discuss later, seems to me to be equal to, if not better than, much of Kiyonaga's. Part of the charm in the study of these old block prints of Japan is the fact that we need not follow another's taste in the choice of our prints. It is a wide field, and almost all the workers have left a large supply of their labours from which we may choose as our fancy dictates.

Kiyonaga was the first to make the triptych and the pentptych, and he also designed some beautiful kakemono-ye and hashira-ye. Although he lived until 1815, his best work was over before the end of the Eighteenth Century, and it marked the culmination of the art.

When Kiyonaga retired from the field in 1790, Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806) was proclaimed by popular choice the only one who could lead this art to higher levels. Up to 1780 Utamaro spent his time as a painter. In his youth he lived in Tokyo near the Yoshiwara, and from the ranks of the Flower Quarter he drew many of his models, depict-

ing them in those "wonderful dresses" of which M. De Goncourt has painted such a vivid word picture. He began by illustrating small works of fiction. He then took up the portrayal of insects,



*Utamaro*

and De Goncourt declares that his drawings of these are miracles of art. Someone has said that the world lost a great naturalist when Utamaro took up the portrayal of women, abandoning that specialty for which he was so naturally gifted. His "Hundred Screamer's" pictures bird life with the eye of a bird expert, his shell book cannot be surpassed, and it is greatly to be regretted that he did not finish and leave to posterity the books on mammals and on fishes that he planned. However, we are fortunate in having his "Testing of the Pines," "Flowers of the Four Seasons," "Fallen Blossoms," "The Green Houses," and "The Silver World."

As a young man, Utamaro had been influenced, as were all the other artists, by the stroke of the fascinating Kiyonaga, and it is not difficult to trace in some of his best designs the effect of this contact with the great teacher of the colour print. Most critics contend that his large heads are his best work, but to me his birds and flowers are marvellous in design. In the beauty of his shells, he almost sur-





UTAMARO—THE WOMAN WITH THE  
CRICKET CAGE





passes nature. The French are the most ardent admirers of Utamaro, probably owing to the glowing descriptions of M. De Goncourt—descriptions that capture the imagination and thrill the very chords of the heart. We almost forget the objects described, so enrapt do we become in pure admiration for such jewels of thought. Through De Goncourt's touching and thoroughly sympathetic tribute we see this idol of the people, we pity him in his weakness, we admire his wonderful skill, and we can see the gorgeous robes which he created and which are there described in such a rhapsody of emotion.

In this rapid sketch, it is impossible to say more of this genius of the Japanese colour print, who could paint the gauze of the insect's wing or picture a mother's love; could fashion the flower to rival nature, or paint the lowest woman so nobly that their pictures hang among those of the great and honoured in the world's galleries of art.

One of the most fascinating of the artists of the Japanese colour print is Hosoda Yeishi, whose years of activity lie between 1780 and 1810. Would I had words to describe the beauty of his prints! The lovely women of his creation are like dream pictures remembered long after the vision has passed. He has been called a

Yeishi

visionary, but oh! the joy he has given us in the portrayal of these shadow-like beings, described so truly in the lines of the poet:

“Time that is swift to smite and rend  
The common things that spring from earth,  
Dares not so surely set an end  
To shapes of visionary birth.

“There often his destroying touch  
Lingers as with a lulled caress  
Adding to that which has so much  
Of alien ghostly loveliness.”

Yeishi was not of the artisan class, but a samurai who studied painting in the aristocratic Kano school, and not even in the declining days of this art, when deterioration of ideals could be seen in the prints of all his contemporaries, did he lose the refinement and aristocratic delicacy that are his most striking characteristics. His prints almost breathe these qualities. Yet his subjects are natural, for they are true to the Japanese woman's aloofness from the ordinary things of life. Yeishi's women are tall and slender beings of queenly bearing and graceful carriage, and we are captivated at once by their quiet Oriental reserve and coyness, be they courtesans, geisha girls, or peasant women. He made a careful study of life among the people, in

all its phases; he avoided exaggeration, and in his prints we have a faithful picture of his time. He has given us a beautiful combination of yellow and black, combined with carmine. I agree with him who has said, "The taste is hard to please which finds monotony in his series of perfections." In some of his triptychs he introduces an interesting colour scheme, "The Treasure Ship" being especially notable for its brilliancy. Yeishi's important works are scarce. He founded a school and had many pupils, one of whom was Yeisho, but none of these followers reached the heights of his master.

An artist whose work is very much like that of Yeishi is Yeishosai Choki, who produced prints from 1785 to 1805, and whose fame has been increasing. His most striking characteristic is a peculiar colour combination: yellow, gray, violet, blue, and black. His prints are very rare, and his silver prints are so highly treasured that the ordinary collector has little chance of securing any of them.



Choki

The last of the great artists before Hokusai and Hiroshige was Utagawa Toyokuni, the son of an image-carver who lived in Yedo and did his best work between 1790 and 1810. In his prints of this period, now extremely rare, Toyokuni pictures tall

women with a delicacy and refinement of expression and a dignity of bearing that make his prints the equal of any of his contemporaries'. The faces of these women remind us of the lovely women of the "Beauties of the Green Houses," drawn by Shunsho

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國

*Toyokuni*

and Shigemasa. Had Toyokuni continued to do the work he did in the 'nineties, I am certain the consensus of opinion would give him a much higher place as an artist in this school, but he probably did more poor work than did any other artist of his time; nevertheless, he has left some fine triptychs, such as, "Ryogoku Fireworks," and "Bath House," where one may see the shadows on the wall. Others are "The Fan Shop," "The Journey of Narahira," and "Ladies and Cherry Blossoms in the Wind." It is possible that, in a few years, abnormal prices may be offered for these fine old prints of Toyokuni's early work, for they are certainly beyond criticism. He drew many triptychs, and seldom attempted landscapes. He also made a number of kakemono-ye, and his prints are plentiful. His best pupils were Kuniyoshi, Kunisada, and Kuniyasu.

Between 1790 and 1795 are placed the prints of Sharaku. The authorities differ so widely on the merits of his work that I can do no more than offer a few of their criticisms and leave the reader, if he

is sufficiently interested, to look up the prints and judge for himself. The French admire his designs for their harmony of colour and delicacy of tone. Fenollosa considers his prints little more than caricatures. Von Seidlitz differs from him and gives this artist a much higher place in Ukiyo. Arthur D. Ficke devotes twenty pages of his *Chats on Japanese Prints* to a most detailed and interesting description of this artist, and I think that Ficke has made it clear that this one-time No-dancer was a great designer of the actor print. I would advise anyone who wishes to learn more about this unique artist and master of tragic irony to read the splendid description given by this writer.

Why any art has its greater and lesser periods just when it does is a question that may be discussed at great length, but in no case of the kind has the truth ever certainly and fully come to light. Of the Japanese colour print, all we can say is that, after Kiyonaga, the body of the work done began to decline in beauty. Of course, there were Utamaro, Yeishi, and Toyokuni, and in the Nineteenth Century came Hokusai and Hiroshige, but the work of these great men rises far above that done by their contemporaries. Chiefly, perhaps, it was a matter of skill in draughtsmanship and quality of materials, but I hesitate to put forth even this generalization.

The reader must not think that the work of the pupils of the masters of the great period and the work of the pupils of Hokusai and Hiroshige was insignificant and valueless. As I shall show in the next chapter, it had much and varied beauty, and in landscape especially there were yet to come some wonderful achievements.

The men of Ukiyo have written the history of Japan in an endless variety of beautiful colours. They awakened an interest in science by the marvelous designs they produced of plant and animal life; they created a desire for the culture of other lands; by the illustrated books which they published, they aroused in the people a longing to travel, and they gave to the populace of this shut-in empire an unbounded source of pleasure. Who can say that the wonderful and rapid growth of the Meiji Period was not due in part to these artists who portrayed the scenes of daily life—to these men of Ukiyo, the school which has been so beautifully interpreted, "The Mirror of the Floating World"?



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE DECLINE

OF COURSE, the great landscape artists of the Japanese colour print were Hokusai and Hiroshige, but they had Eighteenth Century predecessors and interesting contemporaries.

The originator of landscape was Toyoharo, a pupil of Shigenaga and the founder of the Utagawa school. He worked in the years between 1760 and 1780.

The link between the originator of the landscape and the greatest artist in this field was Toyohiro, pupil of Toyoharo and teacher of Hiroshige. Toyohiro worked from 1795 to 1820, and his chief work was in landscape. He also drew female figures and illustrated books. His prints have aristocracy in their delicate lines and colours, with firm brush work and keen contrasts. He seems to have inherited the diffidence of his teacher, and like his brother, Toyokuni, refused to produce prints to suit the taste of the masses.

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廣

*Toyohiro*

Von Seidlitz says that the only real rival of Hokusai from 1810 to 1820 was Kikugawa Yeizan, who was the son of a painter, Kano Yeiji of Yedo, and who worked between 1804 and 1829. He first studied the style of Utamaro, later that of Hokusai. His large heads are considered his best work by some collectors, but his figure prints of women are very attractive, owing to the mellowness of the colours and the attractive features of the faces. Some of these designs, which have appropriate backgrounds of landscape, are among the loveliest of block prints.

英  
山  
Yeizan

Kesai Yeisen (1789-1848) collaborated with Hiroshige in the "Sixty-nine Stations of the Kiso Road." These landscapes are considered his best work. He also drew many figure prints and kakemono-ye. He made some designs in which the whole print is done in blue tones, examples of which are very scarce, and of course greatly in demand. Yeisen also made some surimono that are delicate and tasteful in colour. Two masterpieces are a kakemono-ye of a moonlight scene which is considered a fit companion for Hiroshige's "Monkey Bridge," and the picture of a carp, the Japanese emblem of perseverance, leaping up a waterfall.

英  
泉  
Yeisen

The work of Kitai Kesai Masayoshi is unique.



SHUNSEN—IN THE SNOW



It is said that his methods greatly influenced Hokusai. He aroused in the hearts and minds of the artists of this school a love and reverence for nature, for he studied the landscape of his country and its animal and plant life, and rendered pictures of these subjects with strength and skill; his sketches of flowers in bloom, drawn without contour, are especially famous

There are a number of interesting and important pupils of Shunsho, Toyokuni, and Hiroshige.

Katsukawa Shuncho was a pupil of Shunsho who worked between the years 1775 and 1800. His prints are very much like those of Kiyonaga, but to the close observer there is more delicacy of line and mellowness of colour. His brush strokes are not harsh and masterful like those of Shunsho and his subjects are entirely different. In rank as an artist he has been placed second to Kiyonaga, but for pure beauty in his prints, he stands second to none. This artist lacked the faculty of original conception and for that reason he does not take the place he should among the artists of Ukiyo. To me he has put into his prints more than mere figures walking hither and thither, though those figures are drawn with majesty and strength; he has given them a strangely moving wistfulness and when we look at them we feel that

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*Shunsho*

sudden ecstasy that comes only in the presence of perfect beauty.

An artist of much originality connected with the school of Shunsho was Ippitsusai Buncho, of whom little is known except that he was a samurai. A peculiar mannerism in his way of drawing faces and certain attitudes mark his figure designs, nearly all of which are in hoso-ye form. He used a flowing line and delicate greens, reds, and shadings of gray in all his prints. By some alchemy of colour, he could produce a shade or tone that usually comes only with the passing of years, and his pictures have retained their brilliancy and radiance; hence they are greatly admired.

Another pupil of Shunsho was Katsukawa Shunko, who worked from 1770 to 1800. He came under the spell of the mighty Kiyonaga, but there

remained something of his master's influence in his striking calligraphy, which is so decorative. He shows his originality in the treatment of impressionistic landscapes, and always stamps his own individuality upon his prints.

Also a pupil of Shunsho was Katsukawa Shunyei, rated by many judges even higher than his teacher. He produced many pictures of

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*Buncho*

春  
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英

*Shunyei*

*Shunko*



wrestlers, and fan prints, making the latter very effective with but a few colours. Some see a resemblance to Sharaku's work in his figures.

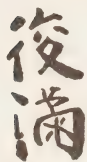
Shunsen, a pupil of Shunyei, flourished between 1790 and 1820. His figure prints in rose-pink, apple-green, and a slate-like blue are very attractive. The faces of his women are more natural than those made by his contemporaries, and some of his prints have a sweet charm all their own. His women figures really enchant us with their human and natural faces. Their sweet modesty, grace, and reserve are qualities characteristic of the women of the Far East. Some commentators pass this artist with a line or two, but to me his prints are filled with pure beauty and charm.

春  
扇  
*Shunsen*

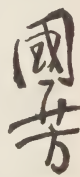
Like all the pupils of Shunsho, Shunzan followed Kiyonaga, but was never lacking in force and originality. His figure studies resemble those of Shunsen, but, if possible, there is even more charm in the sweet simplicity of the faces. A triptych which represents a scene at the gate of a temple is celebrated, and another triptych, reproduced in the Hayashi Catalogue (No. 772), is considered good. There is also a reproduction in *Strange*, page 80. His activity lies in the 'eighties and 'nineties of the Eighteenth Century.

春  
山  
*Shunzan*



Kubo Shunman, said to be a pupil of Shigemasa, began his designing of colour prints about 1780, and continued until 1820. An individual touch is seen in all his compositions. One writer has called him a "symphonist of grays." Fantasy seems to pervade all his designs. Fenollosa says of this artist,  "Everything he does has a strange touch." The Japanese receive the work of this man with more favour than that of most Ukiyo artists. His prints are so rare that it is almost impossible to obtain any samples. The great six-sheet composition, "The Six Tamagawa," is a prize for which collectors all over the world compete.

There are other pupils from the Shunsho school who may be readily recognized by the word "shun" prefixed to their names.

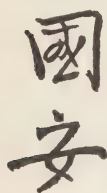
Of Toyokuni's pupils, Kuniyoshi is given first place. The arrangement of his blues and masses of black gives to his prints a characteristic that is not at all unpleasing. His works are prized more highly in England and on the Continent than in this country.  His landscapes are considered his best work, and some of them are considered equal to Hiroshige's. His set depicting incidents from the life of the priest, Nichiren, is pronounced very fine, and

his ghost pictures bring high prices at the auctions. He designed many prints, in which nearly all subjects are represented, and complete lists of them may be found in Von Seidlitz's book. He was born in 1798 and died in 1861.

One artist produced such an abundance of prints in his long activity that he is better known than most of the men who worked during this period of decadence—that is Kunisada (1785–1865). Authorities differ as to his ability, but there is a strength in many of his prints that makes them surpass some of the later designs of Toyokuni. He did poor work, but I think this was due to the fact that, since he attempted so much, he was compelled to let his pupils complete many of his designs. He has left many lovely prints, and is especially admired for his excellent backgrounds. The portrait of Hiroshige is regarded as his masterpiece. He made many triptychs, and collaborated with Hiroshige in one set of the small Tokaido.



Kunisada



Kuniyasu

Kuniyasu (1800–1830) designed landscapes and figures. His prints are very scarce, for he worked but a few years. Their distinguishing features are the shortness of the figures and the mellowness of the colours.

Sadahide worked in landscape and drew his inspiration from Hiroshige. His colours are usually good. Sadamasa also drew landscape, and his work is above the average of his time. Sadanobu made both landscape and figures. These pupils of Kunisada followed custom, took the last syllable of their teacher's name for the first of their own.

Yoshitora, considered the best pupil of Kuniyoshi, drew landscapes, figures, and battle scenes. His colours are less glaring than most of those used at this time. Yoshitoshi did work above the average of his time, when almost all good work was at an end. Kunichiki made many large heads, some of which have very decorative colours; and the last work that really merits any approval by the recognized authorities is the bird prints of Kiosai and Shugakudo. Kiosai was greater as painter than as block-printer, and his studies of crows are famous.

By this time, Commodore Perry had appeared in Yedo Bay and asked admittance to the closed Empire, just as the long reign of the shoguns was drawing to a close. Japan, a nation enlightened, industrious, and ever on the alert for new learning, no matter from what source, was soon to throw open her doors to the nations of the world and receive

from all of them the advancement they had made in science, art, and literature, while she had been delving into the learning of Confucianism and searching the cloisters of China for masterpieces of art.

## CHAPTER SIX

### HOKUSAI AND HIROSHIGE

THE company of masters had gone into the past, but two isolated figures, as great as any of them, came at last to make memorable and not unworthy the final passing of the art.

Katsushika Hokusai was born in 1760, almost forty years before the birth of Hiroshige, and lived until a few years before the death of his great contemporary. Although he lived a long life of poverty and incessant labour, at his death he regretted that he could not have a few more years to give to his art. So absorbing is the desire for advancement in one's chosen field of learning that the years fly by all too rapidly for the enthusiastic student to accomplish half what he has planned to do.

He was a pupil of Shunsho, but left that artist's studio at an early age, for he was too original to be restrained long by the limitations of any teacher. Even the few traditions of Ukiyoe were not observed by this artist, who translated the world to suit his



*Hokusai*



HOKUSAI—FUJI SEEN FROM THE PASS OF MISHIMA,  
PROVINCE OF KAHİ





own fancy. If he so desired, he drew from the aristocratic school of Kano, or delved into the art of China; again at times we may trace the delicate and miniature-like touches of the Tosa school. He came under the influence of all the noted masters of his time, and some of their characteristics he no doubt absorbed; but, as one of his commentators has said, "He emancipated his brush from all such fetters, and drew according to the dictates of his own heart." "This," remarks the equally good authority Arthur Ficke, "was his curse. No man has ever lived with heart profound and subtle enough for such emancipation." Fenollosa says there is no collection of Hokusai's works in Japan, and believes that the Japanese do not place the work of this artist as high as they do that of Hiroshige. Other writers call him, "Hokusai the incomparable." I leave the reader to judge this "Old man mad about painting" by his work, for that was all he had to leave to the world.

It is needless here to relate the many hardships of this artist's long life, or to dwell unduly upon his desire to encompass all things within the scope of his fertile imagination. His drawing seems to fall into three distinct periods. The first is his period of subservience to the conventions of his master and contemporaries, when he manifested no special originality. At this time he used many different names

to sign his work. In 1812 he began a period of realism. It was during this time that he produced that strange "debauch of sketches," known as the "Mangwa," which consists of fifteen volumes of childlike sketches in which he seems to have made an effort to draw anything and everything. These volumes have been an endless encyclopædia of design for the artisans of Japan, and Hokusai has been rightly called the artisan poet. His best work was done between the years 1823 and 1830, which is called by Ficke "his stylistic period." It was during this phase of his career that he gave to the world his great series: "The Thirty-six Views of Fuji," "The Bridges," "The Waterfalls," "The Loochoo Islands," and "The Imagery of Poets." "The Wave," "Fuji in Calm," and "Fuji in a Thunderstorm," are the masterpieces in these series. Because of his many great landscapes Hokusai is usually classed as a landscape artist, but, as we have seen, he drew everything that came under his observation. His bird prints are very fine and rare, and his flower designs are considered the work of a genius. His surimono, not confined to one of his "periods," are very much in demand and bring exorbitant prices. Hokusai died in 1849, and worked almost to the very end.

I cannot place Hokusai highest. His Fuji, with

its long-drawn-out sweep, does not look like the sublime mountain I once saw in the morning light. I do not find in it the mood, "the feel," that I do in any one of Hiroshige's designs of this wonder of Japan, and for me Hiroshige's æsthetic interpretation is the truer. Hokusai translated the scenery of his country according to his own powerful imagination, and the result is a different Japan from the one I saw. His conception of the scenes of his Nippon is made of such massive forms that we can only feel, when looking at one of his prints, the strength, the power, the awe, and the grandeur of nature, with man subordinate to it. He pictured the greatness of Japan according to his own heart's desire.

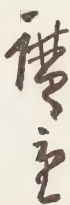
Not so with the women of his creation. They have the lovely grace and simple dignity of the real women of Japan. Hokusai has given us some of the loveliest portrayals of these women to be found in the prints of the *Ukiyo*. It is said that he drew upon Kiyonaga for his ideas of them, but they are not like the plump and normal type of that great master; rather are they idyllic beings, created in the wonderful and fertile imagination of Japan's most fanciful artist.

The reader has before him the diverse opinions of the best authorities on the colour print. Adding to them my own, I pass them on to the reader with

the advice that he go rather to the real source of information—Hokusai's prints themselves. The beauty of it all is, that, whether we try to make an objective critical judgment or not, those of us who have gathered here one print and there another can still treasure in our own small collections the little bits of beauty that we have loved, not for their reputation nor because of the great names collectors have given the artists, but for the simple reason that we like the prints and that to look upon them gives us real enjoyment.

In Ukiyo we have a treasure house from which all may choose that which they especially prefer, and thus keep a record of the advancement of their tastes in this strange field of art.

Ichiyusai Hiroshige was born in Yedo in 1796, and according to a Japanese authority he belonged to a samurai family. He began painting at the age of ten, and while yet in his youth became a pupil of Toyohiro. At this time there was a growing desire for guidebooks, owing to an awakened interest in travel, and Hiroshige saw this demand and took advantage of it.



*Hiroshige*

By chance or fate, while still a young man, he had the good fortune to go to Kyoto, and in so doing it was necessary for him to pass over the

famous highway known as the Tokaido. As travel in those days was a slow process, he had ample time to sketch the stations along the route, and the result was the series known as the "Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido." This series was published in oblong form and is acknowledged by all to be among his best works. The date of the first edition has been fixed at about 1830. Several series of the "Tokaido" were issued in smaller sizes. If the reader wishes to find a description of each print in the "Tokaido" and other series, I know of no better source of information than the work of Basil Stewart, published in 1920.

Hiroshige's "Kisokaido," the stations on the inland road, or mountainous highway, was printed about the same time as the "Tokaido" and consisted of the "Sixty-nine Stations." He made many other series of scenes, among which are the "Hakkei" (eight views) of Lake Biwa, of Kanazawa, and of Yedo, almost all considered masterpieces. Notable also are his "Toto Meisho" and his "Yedo Meisho," which contain many views, a published set depicting noted harbours, and a set called "The Six Tama Rivers," not to mention figure prints, many single sheets, triptychs, scenes in celebrated places, and bird and flower panels, "Kwa Cho," all of which bring prices at the auctions that are almost unbeliev-



able. His great masterpieces are the three triptychs known as "Naruta Rapids," "The Snow on Kiso Mountain," and the "View of Kanazawa in Moonlight." His best works in kakemono-ye are "The Snow Gorge," "The Monkey Bridge," and the "Peacock and Peony."

As Ficke says, Hokusai makes it his first object to give the observer the structure of his "mountains, rocks, rivers, waves, and bridges, with a hard and brilliant sharpness"; but Hiroshige's landscapes have a peacefulness that seems to emanate from the green of the valleys and the blue of the seas. Where is there a visitor to Japan who has not seen the mist rising up to the mountains, and the trees crouching in the wind, just as this artist has pictured them? He shows us the scenes of winter as they were at his time and as they are to-day—the snow-covered cottage and temple, the pure white hillside and mountain. His treatment is realistic, and so he satisfies the longing of the heart for the beauties of nature.

The authorities have accorded to this artist different positions among the artists of Ukiyo, but he undoubtedly holds first place in the hearts of the Japanese people, if not in the minds of all lovers of Ukiyo. Furthermore, Hiroshige was the first of these artists to be appreciated by people of other countries, and his vivid portrayals of the peaceful

and attractive scenes of his own land have sent many visitors to that far-away Oriental country. He chose a subject the symbolical language of which is familiar to all nations, a subject from which the gentle Nazarene drew so many of his beautiful symbols. This choice of subject I think more than anything else has been the cause of his popularity. He drew his landscape in such a realistic manner that we not only enjoy the picture as a picture, but we have the same impressions that we have when looking upon the real scenes in Japan. When looking at one of his fine pictures of Fuji Yama, I am, as it were, transported back to that "Peak of the White Lotus," symbol of Nirvana's perfect peace, and I see the majestic mountain as I saw it one May morning.

What can I say about this queen of mountains that has not already been said? My first sensation was that I was truly at the heart of Japan, in the presence of the symbol of this nation's ideal self. No wonder it is the ambition of every man, woman, and child to reach that changeless peak. I saw the mountain which I had longed to see for many years, and the sight was one of sublime grandeur. Before me in the distance rested the idol of Japan, with the mist folds at its base and the cloud forms on its crest reflecting the tints of the rising sun—grand in the beauty of her symmetry, a beautiful mountain, a



perfect mountain. A peace, a calm, and an all-protecting care seemed to drift down from her silent beauty, and I felt myself under the spell of that Oriental land where hurry ceases and care falls away; I desired only to gaze on and on, loath to depart from that mental haven of rest.

Can you wonder that this mountain is the idol of Japan, the inspiration of her poets, and the subject of much of her art? The artists of the colour prints have done much toward making it possible for all to see the mountain as it appears to one who actually looks upon its snow-crowned loveliness.

No other artist of the Japanese colour print can so vividly recall the scenes of Japan to those who have been there. For those who have not been there, no other of them can create so vividly in picture the land of the ricefields and of mountain grandeur. In his prints we see the dusk of the Oriental night, we hear the sad sweet tinkle of the samisen, and feel ourselves lulled by the ripple of the water. We turn another page, and the pageant of winter is spread before us, where the snow has transformed the most lowly spot into a scene of pure white beauty. Another view, and we find ourselves in the midst of a summer landscape with great showers of cherry blossoms all about us. We find ourselves delighted with the green-terraced mountain-side, the valley



HIROSHIGE—NUMADZU, STATION 13 OF THE  
UPRIGHT TOKAIDO



hidden in the mist, and the blue of the ocean. The scene shifts, and we see the rains descending, the merrymakers hastening to shelter, and the summer-time spread before us. Then comes the autumn with its scarlet and gold of the maple in its evanescent loveliness. The artist has made Japan exist for us by the skill of his brush. His prints are idylls in painting.

I have seen many of the places that Hiroshige has portrayed, and I can truly say that he has caught, in his magic skill, not only the real scenes, but that "something" in picturesque Japan which holds us and makes us reluctant to turn our eyes from sights so restful. His prints are the very essence of Japan. In them we see the green-clad mountains, the mists that float like veils of gossamer, and bits of beauty from the inland sea, that mystical, mountain-enclosed faery place, that will be a heritage to the lovers of art in future generations.

Other masters of colour printing, the strangest art that has ever been conceived, have given us scenes from their country's warlike history, and have portrayed her lordly daimyos and their armed retainers. Her legends and romances have furnished subjects for many of them. The masters of this school have taken as models the geisha girls, the Oiran of the "Green Houses," the actors in play

and romance, the wrestlers in feats of skill, and the conjurers in their magical arts. They have drawn upon the birds of the air, the flowers of the field, and the fishes of the sea. With their marvellous skill, they have pictured the delicate pink of the shell and the rainbow tints of the butterfly. In doing all of this, they have given us some of the most beautiful pictures the world has ever seen; but it was left for Hokusai and Hiroshige, the two masters in the declining years of this great art, to bring to the people of Europe and America the weird and lovely scenes of their own homeland.

THE END

SIGNATURES OF OTHER COLOUR  
PRINT ARTISTS

北  
溪

*Hokkei*

北  
壽

*Hokuju*

清  
廣

*Kiyohiro*

清  
峯

*Kiyomine*

北  
尾  
政  
演

*Kitao  
Masanobu*

重  
政

*Shigemasa*

春  
亭

*Shuntei*

高  
岳

*Sugakudo*

栄  
里

*Yeiri*

栄  
日  
日

*Yeisho*

豊  
春

*Toyoharu*





## GLOSSARY

*Beni:* A delicate pink of vegetable origin.

*Beni-ye:* A print in which beni is the chief colour used.

*Chuban:* A vertical print measuring 8 by 11 inches.

*Dptych:* A composition consisting of two prints.

*Gaufrage:* Printing by pressure alone, without the use of pigment.

*Harimaze:* Sheets of two or more subjects or designs printed on the one sheet and intended to be cut afterward; very uncommon. An example is the set of "Fifty-three Tokaido Stations," by Hiroshige, on fourteen sheets, arranged irregularly, three, four, or five views on one sheet. The title is "Go-ju-san Tsugi Harimaze."

*Hashira-ye:* A very tall narrow print, about 5 by 28 inches.

*Hoso-ye:* A small vertical print, about 6 by 12 inches.

*Ichimai-ye:* A single-sheet print.

*Kakemono:* A painting mounted on a margin of brocade; hung by its top when in use, and rolled when not in use.

*Kakemono-ye:* A very tall wide print, about 10 by 28 inches.

*Key-block:* The engraved wooden plate from which the black outlines of the print were taken. Also, the first proofs from this block.

*Kira-ye:* A print with a mica background.

*Koban:* A vertical print slightly smaller than the chuban.

*Kurenai-ye:* A hand-coloured print in which beni is chiefly used.

*Mon:* A crest or coat of arms, usually worn on the sleeve.

*Nagaye:* Same as hashira-ye.

*Nishiki-ye:* Brocade prints, or the polychrome print.

*Oban:* The normal-sized print, about 10 by 15 inches.

*Otsu-ye:* A print in black and white; a rough sketch.

*Pentaptych:* A composition consisting of five parts.

*Sumi:* Black Chinese ink.

*Sumi-ye:* A print in black and white.

*Surimono:* A print of small size used as a New Year greeting, or as a memento of some festive or social affair.

*Tan:* A brick-red or orange colour. Red oxide of lead.

*Tan-ye:* A print in which tan is the chief colour.

*Tanjaku:* Narrow slips, like miniature kakemono, on which poems were inscribed. Used by Hiroshige for thumb-nail sketches of birds and flowers, slight figure studies, and scenes.

*Triptych:* A composition in three parts.

*Uchiwa-ye:* A print in the shape of a fan.

*Ukiyè:* Prints designed after European canons of drawing, with perspective; also means "bird's-eye-view pictures."

*Urushi:* Lacquer.

*Urushi-ye:* Literally, a print in which lacquer is used to heighten the colour. The term is generally used to describe only the early hand-coloured prints, in which lacquer, colours, and metallic dust were applied to the printed black outline.

*Yokoye:* A large horizontal print, about 10 by 15 inches. The normal full-sized landscape sheet.

## A SHORT LIST OF BOOKS

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- BINYON, R. LAURENCE. *Painting in the Far East*. London, 1908. Chapter XVII is on the colour print.
- BINYON, R. LAURENCE. *Catalogue of Chinese and Japanese Woodcuts in the British Museum*. London, 1916.
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- BRINKLEY, FRANK. *The Art of Japan*, 2 vols., 1901. A work very helpful to the student of Japanese art.
- FENOLLOSA, ERNEST. *The Masters of Ukiyoe*, 1896. A description of 400 selected wood engravings, arranged in their chronological order. It also determines the time limit within which each artist worked and fixes the period of time covered by this school as a whole from 1675 to 1850.

- FENOLLOSA, ERNEST. *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. New York, 1911. (Vol II, Chap. XVII: "Modern Plebeian Art in Yedo.") This is a description of the colour print by one who speaks from actual research into the history of this school and the life and characteristics of their work. There are many fine illustrations of the prints in the Boston Museum and other famous collections.
- FICKE, ARTHUR DAVISON. *Chats on Japanese Prints*. London, 1915. A complete survey of the Japanese colour print and the characteristics of the artists' work. The artists are considered chronologically, and the book contains fifty-six illustrations. An excellent work on the Ukiyo school.
- GOOKIN, FREDERICK W. Much excellent information may be gathered from the catalogues written by Frederick W. Gookin of Chicago, who is considered one of the very highest authorities on the colour print. His lecture before the Japan Society, published in book form, is very fine, but very few copies were made and it is difficult to obtain.
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- LA FARGE, JOHN. *An Artist's Letters from Japan*. New York, 1897. An artist's impressions of Japan set forth in clear and interesting descriptions.
- MORSE, EDWARD S. *Japanese Homes and their Surroundings*. New York, 1889. This is a very helpful book in studying Japanese prints, as it enables the student to understand more clearly the scenes portrayed.

- OKAKURA, KAKUZO. *Ideals of the East*. London, 1903. A well-written book on the ideals of the Japanese people and the symbolical meaning in their art.
- STEWART, BASIL. *On Collecting Japanese Colour-Prints*. New York, 1917. This small book has been written mainly as an aid to the beginner. It is a guide to prices for the amateur, or rather it was at the time of its publication. It is illustrated and is very helpful in the key it gives to the artists' signatures and seals.
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- STEWART, BASIL. *Subjects Portrayed in Japanese Colour-Prints*. New York, 1922. This is an advanced work on the colour print, with many beautiful illustrations.
- STRANGE, EDWARD F. *Japanese Illustrations: A History of the Art of Wood-cutting and Colour-printing in Japan*. London, 1897.
- STRANGE, EDWARD F. *Hiroshige*. New York, 1926. A work on the great landscape artist of Ukiyo. It is profusely illustrated with reproductions in colour. A work for the advanced student or collector.
- VON SEIDLITZ, W. *A History of Japanese Colour-Prints*. London, 1910. The author has gathered together in this history of the Japanese colour print all knowledge that it was possible to obtain from published works, scattered articles, monographs, exhibition catalogues and sale catalogues, extant, and made a complete history of the Ukiyo School of Art.



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